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President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 41

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/56/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/642)

Draft resolutions (A/56/L.19, A/56/L.20, A/56/L.21, A/56/L.22)

The President: I first give the floor to Mr. Papa Louis Fall of Senegal in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/56/L.19 to L.22 in the course of his statement.

Mr. Fall (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*spoke in French*): At a time when all the continents together, in communion with the United Nations, are celebrating the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, with dignity, fervour and deep reflection, I take stock, with seriousness and humility, of the honour that I have been given to speak on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We would like to take this occasion to extend once again our warm compliments to you, Sir, and to say how glad we are to see you preside so capably over the General Assembly at its historic fifty-sixth session.

Before I offer myself up to the ritual of presenting the draft resolutions whose consideration is on the Assembly's agenda, I would like, without imposing too much on your patience, to refer to the most salient events and facts that have marked the recent history of Israeli-Palestinian relations and affected the peace process in the dramatic way that we have all experienced.

As the Assembly knows, since it was first established in 1975, the Committee over which I have the honour to preside has endorsed the sacred cause of the Palestinian people regarding the exercise of its inalienable rights concerning, inter alia, self-determination without foreign intervention, independence, national sovereignty, the right of return and the restitution of property.

The Assembly is no doubt well aware that our Committee's mandate is triply rooted: in the painful past of the Middle East, in the convulsions and uncertainty of the present, and in expectations and hope for a better future. Evolving along the jagged edge between cohabitation and "cohabitension," events have moved quickly from September 1993 — when the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements was signed and there was mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, followed by the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in Jericho and Gaza — up to the present time, which was punctuated a few days

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ago by the important speech in Louisville by the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell.

Members will recall that meanwhile the provocative visit of Mr. Sharon to Haram al-Sharif at the end of September 2000, the resulting Palestinian protests and the brutal Israeli crackdown that followed have exacerbated the resentment, brought about an explosion of rage and unleashed the start of a new Palestinian uprising: the intifada al-Aqsa.

The Assembly is aware of the tragedies that have stained the 14 months since the arrogant profanation of the esplanade of the mosques: protests filled with indignation and revolt in the occupied Palestinian territory; murderous incursions by Israeli forces in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem; blind or targeted assassinations; mass destruction of property; the establishment of new settlements and the expansion of old ones; military occupation; closure of towns; the merciless blockade by the occupying power, et cetera.

These exactions and confrontations provoked by Israeli troops have caused a thousand deaths and just as many wounded — for the most part Palestinians, including many children — led to the expulsion from Israel of tens of thousands of Palestinian workers, paralyzed economic activity in Palestine, and exposed the population to distress and wandering, destroying at the same time whatever residual trust might have remained between the two parties.

Members will agree that faced with such risks of disastrous confrontation, with incalculable consequences in the region and the world, the international community has tried to control the situation through the establishment of a Fact-Finding Committee, created during the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit in October 2000 and chaired by former United States Senator Mr. George Mitchell. The Committee put forward relevant recommendations designed to relaunch the peace process — recommendations to which Israel has tried to take a rather selective approach.

Members will no doubt share the conviction of our Committee that the above-mentioned events in many ways reflect policies of defiance and practices of fait accompli on the part of the occupying Power, its refusal to abide by the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the flouting by Israel of its obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949. In this regard, one should take note of the important meeting to be held on 5 December of the Conference of High Contracting Parties to consider the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

On many occasions our Committee has expressed its serious concern over the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory that I have just described. More than once we have drawn the attention of the international community to the dangers that the conflict poses to the entire region. We have emphasized the urgent need for outside intervention or intercession, asked for international protection for innocent civilians and firmly demanded that international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council be strictly respected.

Our Committee welcomes the constructive and leading role played by the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator. We have encouraged them to persevere along this path, in cooperation with the co-sponsors of the peace process — the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations — while urging the donor community to provide increased budgetary and humanitarian assistance to help the Palestinians to overcome the worst difficulties of the moment.

In accord with the General Assembly and the Security Council, our Committee remains convinced that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until it is effectively settled, and in all its aspects. For their part, the members of the Committee are determined to pursue, in a constructive way, concrete action in implementation of their mandate, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and with the valuable help of all the interested and concerned parties. In doing so, our Committee is even prepared to extend its cooperation to all other States and entities that so wish in order to help bring about our common objective: a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

Having put forward these considerations, I would now like very briefly to introduce the four draft resolutions in documents A/56/L.19 to L.22, realizing that my colleague from Malta will later discuss them in detail.

The first three draft resolutions concern respectively the Committee on the Exercise of the

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and the special information programme on the question of Palestine. The fourth deals with the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

By the terms of draft resolution L.19, the General Assembly would authorize the Committee to pursue its activities, to make all appropriate arrangements for its programme of work and mobilize the necessary aid and support to help the Palestinian people, while continuing to offer its cooperation and support to the Palestinian non-governmental organizations and other civic organizations.

In the second text, the Secretary-General would be requested to continue to provide all adequate means and resources to the Division for Palestinian Rights, including in the framework of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestine Authority.

In the third draft resolution, on the special information programme on the question of Palestine, the Department of Public Information would be called upon, among other things, to continue the programme until the end of the biennium 2002-2003, to disseminate information about all United Nations activities connected with the question of Palestine and to preserve the appropriate audio-visual documents.

In the fourth draft resolution, "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", the General Assembly would express its deep concern over the tragic events that have taken place since 28 September 2000 in the occupied Palestinian territory. It would fully support the peace process on the basis of the principle of land for peace and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), while, in accordance with the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee, calling for measures taken on the ground by the occupying Power to be immediately reversed. It would call on the parties concerned and the international community to take the necessary initiatives for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, a settlement of the problem of Palestinian refugees and the intensification of economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people.

I would like to inform the Assembly, following last-minute consultations, of the following revision made to the sixteenth preambular paragraph of this draft resolution so as to make it consistent — and I would even say, in perfect harmony — with the corresponding paragraph of the corresponding resolution adopted last year. That relevant paragraph would read as follows:

> "Expressing its deep concern over the tragic events in Occupied East Jerusalem and the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 28 September 2000, which have resulted in a high number of deaths and injuries, mostly among Palestinian civilians, and concerned also about the clashes between the Israeli armed forces and the Palestinian police and the casualties on both sides".

I think that in this form, the text will be much more balanced for some people.

Such are the content and the spirit of the four draft resolutions that have just been presented to the Assembly. They articulate positions that have been decided, state the mandates agreed upon and describe the programmes that have been approved, which are all of particular importance, especially in the present delicate situation affecting developments on the ground and diplomatic developments regarding the Palestinian question.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, through me, is thus handing in its work, aware in advance that it can rely on the usual solidarity, massive support and almost unanimous voting of the General Assembly.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Walter Balzan of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Balzan (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, contained in document A/56/35.

In the course of the past year, the Committee continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report I am about to present covers developments relating to the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the

Committee from the time of last year's report through 10 October of this year.

Chapter I, the Introduction, outlines the Committee's objectives and its general perspective on the events that have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee during the year, with special emphasis on the various aspects of the situation on the ground. Also in this chapter, the Committee reviews Israeli actions and policies, and its military response to the intifada; its settlement activity; the situation with respect to Palestinian prisoners; the state of the Palestinian economy; the situation with respect to water resources available to the Palestinians; action by the United Nations system; and the activities and continuing operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action aimed at promoting Palestinian rights in the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council. This section summarizes the communications addressed by the Chairman of the Committee to the Secretary-General and the Presidents of the General Assembly and Security Council. It also includes information on the participation of the Committee Chairman at various international forums.

Section B provides a detailed account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights. It contains information on the dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union. It also gives an account of the various international meetings organized in the course of the year.

Also summarized in this section are the Committee's cooperation with civil society; the research, monitoring and publications work of the Division for Palestinian Rights; the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine; the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI reviews the action taken by the Department of Public Information in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 55/54 of 1 December 2000.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this chapter the Committee emphasizes that, more than five decades after the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 181 (II), the Palestinian people is yet to see the promise of its own State fulfilled. The Committee expresses its readiness to persist in efforts to contribute through its varied programme of activities to international endeavours aimed at stopping the violence and putting the parties back on the peace track. The Committee also reiterates that its overriding and fundamental objective and mandate — the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights — will remain key to all its activities.

The Committee joins the international community in expressing grave concern over the policies and actions of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. The Committee reiterates its position of principle that the problem should be resolved based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other relevant United Nations resolutions and on the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and to their own independent State.

The Committee calls for the immediate and comprehensive implementation of the Mitchell Committee recommendations, as offering the most practicable route back to the peace process. The Committee calls on the co-sponsors of the peace process and on all others concerned to continue to pursue their efforts, looking for innovative approaches that would allow the parties to implement the Mitchell Committee recommendations and to resume their negotiations. The Committee also expresses its belief that stepped up and concrete engagement on the part of key international parties, both regional and extra-regional, is needed more than ever.

The Committee supports the ongoing effort to reconvene the Conference of the High Contracting

Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War in order to ensure respect for the Convention and to provide the necessary protection to the Palestinian people.

The Committee stresses that the United Nations should continue to maintain its permanent responsibility with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine. It expresses strong belief that both the General Assembly and the Security Council should to do everything in their power to help resolve this five-decade-old conflict. The Committee welcomes and strongly supports the increasingly important and highly instrumental role in the overall peacemaking efforts played in the course of the year by the Secretary-General. The Committee also expresses appreciation to the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his persistent efforts aimed at bringing the parties together and for the important work carried out by his Office of coordinating international assistance to the Palestinian people. The Committee also strongly urges the international donor community to assist the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to contribute generously to its budget in order to enable the Agency to continue to deliver its vital humanitarian services to the some 3.8 million Palestine refugees registered with it.

The Committee expresses appreciation for the contribution made by non-governmental organizations working untiringly to mobilize solidarity with the Palestinian people, to provide emergency relief under difficult circumstances to the population in the occupied Palestinian territory and to raise international awareness of that people's inalienable rights, in particular the right of return. The Committee emphasizes that its cooperation with the wide network of non-governmental organizations on the question of Palestine will be intensified and focused on issues of common concern. The Committee pledges to continue to review and assess its programme with a view to making it more responsive to developments on the ground and in the peace process. It intends to focus its work in the next year on the question of the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, on efforts to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and the role of the United Nations therein, and on international assistance to the Palestinian people.

The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives, and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities, in particular the further development of the document collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine. The Committee also notes the usefulness of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority and requests the Division to continue it.

The Committee expresses the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion on the relevant issues. The Committee also requests the programme's continuation, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee calls on all States to join in that endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today, the world is going through a difficult time because of recent events and because of the repulsive resurgence of terrorism, which constitute a threat to international peace and security. This places a tremendous challenge before the world and requires cooperation among all parties to put an end to this scourge, which poses a threat to all humanity. It also poses a threat to the peoples of the world and has become their principal concern. The world has mobilized all its forces to deal with this challenge and its aftermath. For the first time, it is seriously trying to find the causes and factors that led to the creation of an environment propitious for terrorism and for the flourishing of terrorism.

The flagrant State terrorism in which Israel engages has created a poisonous atmosphere in the Middle East and has caused an escalation in incendiary reactions in many parts of the world. The United

Nations must shoulder its responsibility to tackle that evil. Likewise, the standstill in the Middle East peace process has given rise to a number of causes for concern and frustration among the peoples of the region.

The peace process has been at a standstill since the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister of Israel. Since taking office, he has brought the process back to square one; he has stopped the negotiations; launched brutal military attacks on Palestinian towns and villages; assassinated civilians and raided houses; destroyed farms and hundreds of thousands of plants; imposed an embargo on towns and villages; and shelled residential areas while encouraging settlements and killing Palestinian residents in cold blood.

The Israeli army is destroying Palestinian institutions and imposing instead Israeli authority, while seeking to incite civil war among Palestinians by sowing discord. The Israeli Government is calling for an end to violence, even while its army is occupying all of the Palestinian territories, engaging in terrorism and carrying out killings and assassinations. It is the army that opened fire after consolidating its occupation — more than 40,000 soldiers have been added to those already present in the West Bank and Gaza — an area of only 5,800 square kilometres. Israeli tanks have invaded towns and villages, which have endured artillery shelling, missile attacks and bombings by American aircraft.

Israel demands that we take responsibility for maintaining public order and security, even while its forces are bombing Palestinian towns and villages and repeatedly invading them, in order to implement their policy of harassment of the civilian population. Israel has put an end to the negotiations and arrogantly calls for peace, which apparently should be established through the use of force. At the same time, it is continuing to establish Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories — settlements that now number more than 150.

It is particularly surprising that Israel is calling on the Palestinian Authority to maintain law and order, because it is well aware that the Palestinian Authority controls only 18 per cent of the Palestinian territories that are now under occupation, whereas Israel, from a security standpoint, controls 80 per cent of that territory, pursuant to the agreements reached. This is compounded by the fact that the Israeli army has destroyed police stations and official and legitimate police headquarters, and has no hesitation whatsoever in assassinating police officers and security officials.

After more than eight years of political negotiations following the Oslo agreement, Israel continues to procrastinate. It continues to occupy all the Palestinian territories and has tightened the siege and blockade on the Palestinian people.

The first intifada of 1991 died down, and a political process was then undertaken thanks to an American initiative, leading to a Peace Conference in Madrid. The Palestine Liberation Organization recognized Israel's right to exist, as a first step towards peaceful coexistence between two independent States, in keeping with internationally binding resolutions.

The Oslo agreement was arrived at, which stipulated that negotiations should be held in two phases: first, a transitional phase, then the decisive and final stage, spanning five years, which were extended for another year in response to a request by the United States, which is the sponsor of the peace process along with European States and other friendly States.

In spite of all this, the peace process is still at square one. It has not achieved the success that was expected of it, and, according to the Oslo agreement, 750,000 Palestinian refugees who were driven from their land during the 1967 war should have been allowed to return to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Israel has spread out its forces throughout 90 per cent of Palestinian territory aside from Jerusalem and the settlements, even though the intention of the agreement was to permit the Palestinian Authority to take over civil administration. That should have happened in the first two years — the transitional period — dissolving Israeli military control over those areas, so as to make it possible, at the beginning of the third year, to embark on negotiations with a view to a final resolution on the questions of Jerusalem, the settlements, refugees, borders and water.

However, Israel has failed to implement any of these agreements. On the contrary, Israeli extremists killed Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, the previous leader of the Government, in order to put an end to the Oslo peace process and requirements. The Government changed with Shimon Peres at its head, and right away the Israeli Government committed its abominable crime at Qan'a, killing hundreds of innocent Lebanese victims

under United Nations protection in southern Lebanon. This is attested to by the United Nations.

Following that, Israeli elections were held and Benjamin Netanyahu became Prime Minister. The new Israeli Government then sought to restart negotiations on various issues, including Hebron, saying that it needed to deal with a number of questions that it claimed affected Israeli security. A security agreement was entered into and was signed by the three parties: the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States, Israeli security and Palestinian security. Mr. Netanyahu rejected that agreement. Subsequently, on 15 January 1998, the Israeli Government took a decision setting out its vital national interests that could not be given up in any agreement, whether transitional or final. They included establishing an eastern security area 80 kilometres long and 16 kilometres wide along the bank of the Jordan River, as well as a western security area, which follows the green line that divides us from Israel. Such security areas were also established around the Israeli settlements, which numbered 148 in 1996. They also took steps to protect their infrastructure, including, in particular, water, electricity and transport. Military bases of strategic importance or necessary for deterrence were also established. Israel also focused on road networks in the west and east, north and south that provide for the security of the settlements as well as the holy places and Jewish historic sites. As a consequence, only little remained of Palestine. This decision on the part of the Israeli Government was just one link in a chain of many such actions designed to establish Israel's policies before Mr. Netanyahu visited Washington in January 1998, with respect to defining the redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank.

The Netanyahu Government avoided redeploying its forces, leaving that task to the next Government. In his statement to the General Assembly just a few days ago, the Israeli representative claimed that all occupied territories with the exception of two per cent had been offered to the Palestinian Authority. That is a monstrous falsehood. Israel insisted on retaining its control of Jerusalem and three extensive settlements in the West Bank, while annexing adjacent areas. Israel wanted to set up three early-warning sites in the West Bank so as to facilitate freedom of movement in Palestinian airspace, and also demanded long-term control, 99 years, over areas adjacent to the Dead Sea, together with other details that would have led to a demilitarized Palestinian state under the trusteeship of Israel, with no independence of its own. At the same time, Israel refused to permit Palestinian refugees to return to their land or even to recognize their right to return.

The Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at the Camp David summit, led by former President Bill Clinton, were a failure. A member of the American peace team who assisted President Clinton on Arab-Israeli issues put the blame for the failure on Mr. Barak. He resigned shortly afterwards. An article blaming Barak for the failure of those negotiations was published in *The Washington Post*.

When the Sharon Government came to power, the Israeli army began a ferocious terror campaign, and since then the economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has deteriorated and the national Authority has been undermined by the division of Palestinian territories into blockaded communities and cantons. The Palestinian Authority now has no control over the majority of the Palestinian territories. As a result of the Israeli terror, 74 per cent of Palestinian children under 14 have had to leave school to find work because of the pressure, the stress and the destruction of their schools.

Because of the Israeli terror, the Palestinian National Authority has been unable to provide economic protection against all kinds of exploitation, and as a result of the blockade imposed by Israel, rates of school enrolment and levels of social services and health care have dropped. The agricultural sector has also been hit, because there are is no market for agricultural products. The unemployment rate is now at 40 per cent, while, according to UNRWA, the nutritional needs of 85 per cent of citizens are not being met.

The World Bank report also noted that the poverty rate has risen by 50 per cent in a period of two years, while the legal and judicial systems have almost ceased to function. Palestinian society has become turbulent, with lives being disrupted. In this context, Amnesty International pointed out that the West Bank has been divided into 227 separate zones, making it easier for Israel to dominate those areas and to control movement therein.

All these pressures have led to a resurgence of the intifada and to unrest. It is not easy for the resisting general population to return to previous conditions when they see no promising political future. The Israeli

terror campaign has resulted in the bombing of houses, destruction of social and educational facilities, the killing of children and the destruction of schools and infrastructure, as well as of plants and textile factories and the food sector. All this destruction has exacerbated the intifada, which was proclaimed in order to defend Al-Aqsa Mosque and Islamic and Christian holy sites. It subsequently became an uprising for the independence of the Palestinian population and the liberation of the areas occupied in 1967. The blockade, and the terror inflicted by Israel, have destroyed any mutual trust between Palestinians and Israelis and undermined any feeling of peaceful coexistence. It has led simply to a relationship of confrontation and the rejection of the status quo.

Israel is still seeking to achieve its objectives by means of military force. In the first year of the Al-Aqsa intifada, the Palestinian people offered up 805 martyrs, while more than 31 thousand people were injured, according to official statistics. Some 175 children under the age of 14 are included in those figures.

This means that the rate of child casualty is now 35 per cent. Four hundred and thirty-seven children have been permanently disabled or handicapped and require constant care and rehabilitation. The Palestinian struggle against Israeli terror is the first priority of the Palestinian people today.

The intifada has forced Israel's Arab population to give priority to national issues such as occupation and settlements over other problems, such as social inequities suffered by Arabs vis-à-vis Jews, as a result of the policy of terror carried out by Israel in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Palestinian people have confronted conflicting policies of the Jewish State with respect to the national rights of Palestinian citizens in Israel.

The intifada has also increased the solidarity of the Arab minority in Israel, strengthening its ties with the West Bank and Gaza, and this has further increased the terror Israel directs against its own citizens. In Israel, there is much talk of expelling Palestinians and driving them out. This has reached the point where the Palestinian members of the Knesset face repressive racist practices and lose their parliamentary immunity, which has further compounded the terror directed against Palestinians in Israel. Those who strive to defend democracy should not be misled into making distinctions among Israeli citizens, choosing one over another. Such democracy is not real; it makes distinctions on an ethnic and a religious basis.

Chapter 2 of the partition resolution, General Assembly resolution 181 of 1947, under which Israel was created, states that there shall be no restriction on the freedom of citizens to use any language in private conversation, commercial activities, religion, the press or publications of any kind. The resolution also states that appropriation of Arab lands in the Jewish State or of Jewish lands in the Arab State shall not be permitted.

The partition resolution also provides for the right of citizenship. In Chapter 3, it states that Palestinian citizens living in Palestine outside Jerusalem, and Jews living in Palestine outside Jerusalem, who are not of Palestinian nationality, shall become citizens of the State in which they live and shall enjoy all its civil and political rights merely by recognizing the independence of the State. The State of Israel has not granted citizenship to Palestinians, but Palestinians living on Palestinian land before it was partitioned have obtained it by right from their fathers and grandfathers.

Today, the world is convinced of the need to create a Palestinian State. This has been reflected in the statements of most Members of the United Nations in the course of the General Assembly session of the last few days, including the statement made by the American President, George Bush. This fact empowers us to say that, more than anything else, the withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 is a step that is necessary for the creation of a Palestinian State, to be recognized by the United Nations pursuant to the resolutions of international legitimacy, so that the Palestinian people can exercise their right to self-determination.

The Israelis claim that Israel has not been subjected to international pressure as a result of its practices, policies of assassination and acts of aggression in the region, which enables it to pursue its activities with a view to liquidating the remaining Palestinian resistance. Israeli leaders assert that Palestinian resistance is terrorism and that Israel's security requires these actions against it.

Political representatives of the Palestinian side, citing the Israeli premise that the resistance must be eliminated, state that the international community must bring effective pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to put an end to its terrorist policies and

practices. The sponsors of the peace process should not align themselves with one party against another; they must put pressure on all parties concerned to ensure that they comply scrupulously with the agreements entered into.

We must all recognize that Mr. Sharon has called for the establishment of a Palestinian State on 42 per cent of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 — that is, he wants to set up a misshapen, divided State under the trusteeship and domination of Israel. The European Union Summit, held in Berlin in 1999, recognized the need to establish a Palestinian State — an autonomous, peace-loving, democratic and viable State — and no one is entitled to use a veto against such a State.

The creation of such a State, as affirmed by the Berlin Declaration, is the best assurance of Israel's security. We take the view that the United Nations should shoulder this responsibility and respond to it by urgently sending international forces to Palestinian territories to replace the Israeli army of occupation, which should, as a first step, withdraw from all the territories occupied in 1967. Likewise, the slogan of an independent State should not remain a dead letter or merely a headline in the press. Practical steps should be taken to implement it so that we can avoid spending another ten years in negotiations simply for the sake of negotiation.

Mr. Colin Powell, in a recent statement, spoke about a Palestinian State and about the occupation and settlements. He said:

> "Israel must be willing to end its occupation, consistent with the principles embodied in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and accept a viable Palestinian State in which Palestinians can determine their own future on their own land and live in dignity and security."

Mr. Powell has also said that Israel must put an end to the settlement policy, end its occupation of Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and revoke all the measures it has taken to blockade Palestinian areas and to restrict the movement of citizens and goods.

All these statements must be translated into practice. Machinery must be established to end the occupation as a first step towards the creation of the Palestinian State. There is a pressing need to define and analyse the details of Mr. Powell's statement in order to determine its objectives and so that we can be confident in the political resolve of the United States Government to ensure a just and final settlement in the Middle East. We expect similar political resolve from the Europeans.

The American position must be translated into concrete action by exerting pressure on Israel to end its occupation, withdraw its army as soon as possible and dismantle the settlements, in accordance with Security Council resolution 465 (1980). This should be followed by the recognition of the Palestinian State within the borders of the territories occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Building peace and security requires us to address urgent issues around the world, foremost of which is the question of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Any procrastination or hesitation in the search for a settlement to the conflict will make the Arab region and the Middle East as a whole sources of turmoil and disruptive terrorism. Israel's terrorist and expansionist policies and the support it receives from some countries make it impossible to safeguard peace and security in that region. It will doom any political initiative to failure even before it is launched.

The deliberate imbalance of forces in the Middle East should not be allowed to continue or to be the sole factor determining the region's future. Justice, human rights, peace and security should be the objectives of the foreign policies of all States concerned in the region if we are to eliminate the causes of war and terrorism and to restore peace and stability to the peoples of the region.

In conclusion, so long as unjust sanctions are imposed on the fraternal people of Iraq, the situation will continue to be unstable. These sanctions must be ended. Iraq must be restored to its rightful cultural place in the family of nations. That would serve humankind as a whole.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Ever since the creation of the United Nations, the question of Palestine has been discussed under different names; while dozens of recommendations and resolutions have been adopted concerning the illegitimacy of the occupation of the Palestinian territories and the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homes. They have been forced to leave

their lands and should be allowed to return home or to be compensated if they so wish.

Since the creation of the State of Israel, the Middle East has not known a single moment of peace. For over 50 years, peace has eluded the region because of Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories and its pursuit of a policy of expansion. Israel has thus continued to annihilate a people that has been deprived of its rights, despoiled of its annexed lands and seen its property destroyed. Its dignity has been trampled.

The international community has responded to the appeal to combat terrorism. The Security Council was called to meet on an urgent basis and adopted resolutions to fight terrorism, uproot it and drain its resources. That objective is supported by all peace-loving peoples and has been reiterated by all responsible Governments. Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is to be condemned and fought. Occupation is certainly a genuine form of terrorism. Israel, occupying the territory of others by force, conducts official State terrorism by pursuing its extrajudicial policy of assassination, imposing sanctions, closing roads, inhibiting the movement of Palestinians, preventing them from working and condemning them to hunger. All this confirms the aggressive nature of Israel's policy and violates international and humanitarian laws.

It is clear that the violence in the occupied Palestinian territories has emerged essentially from despair over many years of occupation, the heinous practices of the occupying forces and Israel's continued establishment and expansion of settlements, failure to respect its commitments, reluctance to fulfil its obligations and contempt for all agreements and conventions.

The new eruption of violence, instability and insecurity and the absence of peace in the region once again confirm the international dimensions of the Palestinian question and the United Nations responsibility, which will endure until a solution is found to the Palestinian problem and until Israel withdraws from the occupied Lebanese Shebaa farms and the Syrian Golan Heights. This is a political, moral and legal obligation upon the United Nations, requiring it to make every effort to ensure the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and all provisions of international law.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia expresses its support and appreciation for the statement made by United States President George Bush to the General Assembly, in which he maintained that violence against Palestine is the responsibility of all and not just of one party. He also maintained that both Israel and Palestine have the right to exist as two independent States. This is what was confirmed by Secretary of State Powell in his statement in Louisville, Kentucky, and what many world presidents have demanded. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia thus expects the international community to make every effort to help in the resumption of the peace process and in the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — so that Palestinian refugees might return to their homeland, should they wish and those who do not wish to return might be compensated, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) — and in the creation of a Palestinian State, with the Arab city of Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, as its capital.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): On this very day in 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which altered the face of history in the Middle East and divided Palestine, then under the British mandate, into two States: an Arab state and a Jewish state. It also established an independent regime for the city of Jerusalem.

Regrettably, here we are, 54 years since the adoption of that resolution and dozens of other resolutions issued by the Security Council and the General Assembly; yet, the Palestinian people are still deprived of their inalienable rights to self-determination — theirs under the Charter of the United Nations — and of the establishment of their own independent State on their territory.

The historical responsibility of the United Nations with respect to this question, in all its dimensions, is one that will not cease until a lasting, just and comprehensive settlement is reached on all aspects of the problem.

The question of Palestine is currently going through a critical juncture and the Palestinian people face a real dilemma. As if the occupation that has persisted for 34 years were not enough of a dilemma, the Palestinian people have been subjected for the last 14 months to flagrant and continuous Israeli aggression, which has resulted in the death of hundreds and the injury of tens of thousands, as well as in the

severe crippling of the Palestinian economy and property.

One might ask why the brave people of Palestine have to bear this heavy loss of life and property. The answer in our minds is clear. The colonization of this people has gone on too long. Palestinians have grown intolerant of the Israeli military occupation of their land in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Their hope of attaining a just peace that would relieve them of the nightmare of the occupying Israeli soldiers, who forcefully dictate the will of the occupying Israeli authorities, has been dissipated. Such a peace would lead them out of the cycle of sieges, closures and checkpoints and free them from the harm caused by colonialist Israeli settlers who ravage their land every day, steal their water and burn their harvest and murder their kinsmen under preposterous pretexts.

The Palestinian people are resisting the Israeli occupation for all these reasons. The Palestinian people are also calling for peace for all these reasons. And for all these reasons we, the international community that believes in the purposes and principles of the Charter, must assist the Palestinians in attaining their goal of establishing an independent State on their land.

From Egypt's perspective, there are three key points for the settlement of the Palestinian question. The first lies in the fact that East Jerusalem is now occupied land and is part of occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank and Gaza, from which Israel must completely withdraw. This is enshrined in all relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980) and the relevant General Assembly resolutions, as well as the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The second point is that the colonialist Israeli settlements in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza continue to have devastating effects on the situation of the Palestinians, their security, rights, national aspirations and hopes of establishing their own independent State on their land. Support by the Israeli Government of these settlers and their aggressive and provocative behaviour violates Israel's obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. In this context, Egypt expresses its satisfaction with the decision of the States parties to the Convention to resume their Conference on 5 December to examine Israel's grave violations of its obligations.

The third point is that resolution of the question of Palestinian refugees should be based on justice, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 and other subsequent resolutions, all of which clearly stipulate the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and their right to compensation should they choose not to return.

Israel's disregard for the centrality of these points and their direct impact on the attainment of a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question will only result in prolonging the conflict and exacerbating the violence, causing more casualties on both sides, without attaining a peaceful solution.

We are keenly aware of Israel's continuous attempts to complicate the situation and to waste the many opportunities to achieve peace. In doing so, it resorts to known and obvious methods, and we hope the international community will see them for what they really are. Sometimes Israel resorts to procrastination and delay. At other times it resorts to the imposition of impossible conditions and becomes intransigent in the implementation of those conditions. On many occasions it resorts to provoking the Palestinian side, either by assassinating its activists and its leadership or by repressing demonstrations using live ammunition or other measures that provoke a logical and predictable reaction by the Palestinians. Most important, its goal is to avoid returning to political dialogue, even if the alternative is a situation in which the violence continues and in which Israel will naturally have the upper hand.

Acting under the pretext of achieving security for its citizens, Israel takes a series of repressive measures and invades the territories of the Palestinian Authority, killing people and destroying houses and property. The international community criticizes Israel, then later implores it to withdraw. Israel withdraws some measures; every one applauds that move then forgets what has been inflicted on the Palestinians in terms of destruction and repressive policies that contradict the most basic concepts of human rights.

Egypt believes that the international community and the parties concerned should be aware of this game. It should exert pressure to resume the political dialogue with the aim of ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory and to hasten the process of bringing a Palestinian State into existence, since this is

the only way to guarantee stability and peace in the region.

Through our close observation of the general debate in the General Assembly, held during the second week of November, we can say, from the statements of heads of State and Government and foreign ministers, that the international community has become aware, more than ever, of the importance of the establishment of a Palestinian State. Such a State, whose territory would consist of all Palestinian lands occupied by Israel in 1967 in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza and which will have the elements of continuity and sovereignty and which will uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter and will strive for peace in the region, is the best guarantor of stability in the region and would be a real beginning of a new phase in the history of the Middle East. This was the general opinion, the consensus, in the general debate. This is what we believe is right.

We have no doubts about this international consensus regarding the importance of establishing a Palestinian State with the components that I have mentioned. What is more important now is to translate that international will into an ability to influence the course of events, and thus shape world opinion into a clear and specific mechanism with a time frame that will achieve the desired goal.

In that context, Egypt supports the elements announced on 19 November by the United States Secretary of State as essential for the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Ending Israeli occupation, which is at the core of the problem, will, in essence, end the problem. It is incumbent on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides to assume the responsibilities entailed in ending the occupation. They must rise up to meet that challenge.

On the other hand, it is important for all the parties concerned to realize that the political efforts being exerted to control the situation in the occupied territories and to return the two sides to political dialogue should not become a temporary exercise whose sole purpose is to restore tranquillity. Egypt believes that any political efforts made at this moment should be aimed at inducing the two parties to reach a final settlement. They should not be limited solely to restoring calm in a political vacuum or to having a political goal without a time frame for its achievement. The political settlement to which Egypt is committed to contribute constructively must take into account the following elements.

The first element is the establishment of a viable Palestinian State on the entire territory of the West Bank and Gaza, with its capital in East Jerusalem. The second is the establishment of good-neighbourly relations and constructive cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians in the context of mutual respect. The third is the provision of security to all parties through balanced arrangements to fulfil their interests.

We had hoped that the discussion of the agenda item on Palestine at this session would be the culmination of many years of the General Assembly's examination of this issue. Yet Israel has once again insisted on prolonging the suffering of the Palestinian people and their quest for achieving their hopes and aspirations for a free, independent and dignified life.

Despite all of this, there is still great hope. The Palestinian State will soon come into being, thereby enshrining the long overdue national dream of the Palestinian people. Egypt will continue to support Palestine and its people with all its capabilities until they fully attain their inalienable and legitimate national rights.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): This important debate on the question of Palestine coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is an important occasion not only for Palestine but also for those of us who strongly believe in the inalienable right of peoples to self-determination and to free themselves from foreign occupation and oppression. On this Day the international community reaffirms its continued and unwavering support for and solidarity with the long-suffering people of Palestine in their national struggle to achieve their long-cherished goal of establishing an independent and sovereign State.

We are grateful for the extremely useful statement made a few moments ago by Mr. Kaddoumi with his characteristic passion and clarity of analysis.

Every year over the past three decades, we have revisited this subject again and again in the Assembly. It is clear from the debates that have taken place here that there has always been a strong expression of solidarity with the people of Palestine, and clear and unambiguous support for efforts towards a political solution of the Palestinian question through dialogue

and negotiation. Sadly, however, neither those debates nor the consideration of the issue in the Security Council — including the adoption of its resolution 1322 (2000) of 7 October 2000 — have had any impact at all on the situation. It is regrettable that in spite of the fact that there have been more than 800 Palestinians killed and about 20,000 Palestinians wounded since September last year, the Organization, and especially the Security Council, has failed to take any significant action to bring about an end to the violence. This tragic state of affairs is likely to continue, resulting in even more deaths, injury and destruction, unless immediate efforts are made to end the violence. The international community, particularly the Organization and the Security Council, in fulfilment of their responsibility under the Charter, must act, and act promptly.

In his address to the General Assembly, President Yasser Arafat said that

> "International sponsorship of the Middle East peace process is the only true guarantee for efforts by the international community to make peace an established reality in our region. The absence of international involvement in this conflict — in the serious search for a solution to the Palestinian question, in accordance with justice and the principles of international law — will push the region back into a spiral of violence, confrontation and bloodshed and could make the situation more explosive and fragile." (*A/56/PV.46, pp. 33-34*)

President Arafat's words must be seriously heeded. My delegation fully shares his views and underscores the essential need for the international community to be actively involved in efforts to bring the peace process back on track, and to effectively move it forward.

Malaysia deplores all forms of violence, whether by individuals, groups or State authorities. It gives us no pleasure to criticize any Member State of the Organization, but, in the face of the ongoing violence, we must condemn the continued disproportionate and excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians, and the collective punishment of the Palestinian people through the prohibition of the movement of persons, goods and resources, closures and blockades, the demolition of houses, the bulldozing of olive trees, extrajudicial killings of targeted Palestinians and other forms of political and severe economic restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people. Those actions constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. We Members of the Organization have a clear responsibility to ensure that the provisions of the Convention and other relevant principles and norms of international law are respected, and that innocent civilians living under Israeli occupation are protected.

Specific measures must be taken to put an end to the violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people. Palestinian leaders have asked for an international mechanism to monitor the situation on the ground, thereby ensuring the safety of unarmed civilians. That proposal deserves the unqualified support of the international community, as it would have the immediate effect of defusing the explosive situation on the ground and instilling confidence between the two sides.

The General Assembly, being very concerned about the situation on the ground, should urge the Security Council to intensify efforts to end the spiral of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory; to examine the many constructive ideas that have been brought before the Council, including, in particular, the idea of an international presence or mechanism on the ground; and to arrive at a final consensus in the Council at an early date in order to calm the situation.

My delegation calls on Israel to return to the negotiating table and conduct its negotiations with the Palestinian side in good faith, dictated by the need to end and resolve the issue once and for all, in the best interests of all concerned. Since a political settlement through dialogue is the only realistic solution to the conflict, it is in the interest of Israel itself to revive the peace track and deal seriously and constructively with the Palestinian leadership as it finds it, not as it wishes it to be. The peace process must be a serious one which will deal with all the core issues and must lead to a genuine peace settlement. It should not be a charade of going through the motions of a peace process to appease critics while more and more settlements are illegally constructed in Palestinian lands.

In order to create between the parties the confidence necessary for a resumption of the political dialogue, all past agreements between the two parties must be upheld and steps must be taken to effect their

early implementation. As immediate first steps to end the violence and to build mutual confidence, there must be a serious implementation of the Mitchell report and the Tenet plan. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the appointment of General Anthony Zinni as the United States special adviser to the Secretary of State for the Middle East and wishes him every success in his difficult assignment of brokering a new ceasefire between the parties. It is our hope that his efforts will not meet with yet more impediments.

My delegation is confident that the Assembly will vote in favour of the draft resolutions, thereby sending to Israel yet again a clear message of the overwhelming wish of the international community for an early end to the conflict through dialogue and negotiations, not through its current policies of more military actions or the continued oppression of the Palestinian people. Support for the draft resolutions would also be a further manifestation of Member States' continued solidarity with, and support for, the just struggle of the Palestinian people on this important Day of Solidarity. For its part, Malaysia reiterates its firm, consistent and unqualified support for the Palestinian leadership and people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination, including the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reiterate the solidarity of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the Palestinian people and their just and sacred cause. We hope that the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People this year will mark the beginning of the complete restoration of the rights of the Palestinian nation.

The second half of the twentieth century was marked by the struggle of the Palestinian people for the exercise of their fundamental and natural rights. During these years, the Palestinian people were uprooted from their homeland, dispersed into exile and stripped of their rights. The occupying Power resorted to all possible means to negate their very existence, but the question of the Palestinians and their just and heroic struggle remains at the forefront for the international community and at the core of the conflict in the Middle East.

For the last 50 years, Palestinians have woken up every day to the ruthless atrocities, occupation, suppression, repression and carnage perpetuated by Israel. However, the recent 14-month period which followed the provocative events at Al-Haram Al-Sharif in September 2000 was one of the most violent periods in the history of the Palestinian struggle. During this period, the Israeli regime, in pursuit of its bloody, campaign and aggressive policy against the defenceless Palestinian people, employed more vicious measures. Hundreds of Palestinians were killed and several thousand injured. The Israeli regime used different kinds of heavy and sophisticated weapons in an excessively harsh and indiscriminate manner. By using fighter aircraft, they even expanded the scale of their brutality against unprotected Palestinian targets beyond what could have been imagined. Their security apparatus resorted to the targeted extrajudicial assassination of Palestinians, claiming the lives of innocent people, including children. Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails have also been subjected to psychological pressure and physical torture, in flagrant violation of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Also, the Israeli policy of settlement activities in Palestinian territories has been expanded. The number of settlers increased by thousands during the year. Several hundred Palestinian residential buildings were demolished and several thousand buildings shelled. At the same time, armed settler groups set Palestinian properties on fire in an attempt to occupy their land, and the policy of Judaization of Palestinian cities, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, was accelerated.

The incursion of heavily armed Israeli forces into Palestinian areas constitutes yet another heavy-handed criminal act carried out by a Government armed to the teeth against a defenceless population. Such incursions further exacerbated the plight of Palestinians and added to the destruction, loss of lives and instability in the whole region.

Also, the Palestinian economy, as a result of various restrictive policies of Israel, dangerously disintegrated, and protracted closures of the occupied Palestinian territories have had a disastrous effect on the Palestinian economy, as well as on individual Palestinian households.

Recent events have further demonstrated the need for an international intervention with a view to

protecting defenceless Palestinian civilians from ever-increasing atrocities at the hands of Israelis, and the international community has a responsibility to put an end to this.

Today it seems that the international community has finally recognized that the situation in Palestine is the source of many political and security problems that could at any moment endanger global peace and security. It is now clearer than ever that the continuation of the occupation of the Palestinian territories, Syrian Golan and Lebanese Shaba' is the principal cause of the tension and instability in the region.

We have to seize this opportunity to advance the cause of Palestine. We sincerely hope that the new statements from Western countries will be followed up with concrete actions, thus putting an end to the continued suffering of the Palestinian people for more than half a century. It is time for the international community to stand by the Palestinians more resolutely than ever before and render its full support for the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. An end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and full restoration of all legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to return to their homeland, are the main pillars of any solution.

I would like to close by reaffirming that the Middle East crisis and the issue of Palestine can be settled only through the recognition of historical as well as current realities in the region, the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian nation, in particular, the right of return, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and the participation of all original inhabitants of Palestine, including Muslims, Jews and Christians, in determining their own political system in a democratic referendum.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Our consideration of the question of Palestine is taking place this year in the context of a disturbing deterioration of the situation in the occupied territories, which has been marked, on one hand, by the subjection of the civilian Palestinian population to unspeakable repression by the Israeli occupying forces and, on the other hand, by the reaffirmed resolve of the international community to give new impetus to the peace process, which has been at a standstill for several months now, and to arrive at a just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The fact is that Israeli repression has reached a climax these past weeks with the increase in targeted assassinations, the destruction of houses, repeated military incursions in zones under Palestinian control, illegal closure and occupation of Palestinian institutions and properties, the use of heavy artillery against unarmed peoples and systematic recourse to violence, sowing fear and despair among the civilian population.

At the same time, the Israeli Government is pursuing an unrelenting daily policy of territorial expansion, in violation of United Nations resolutions and is turning a deaf ear to appeals by the international community to freeze its settlement policy.

In sum, the successive incidence of breach of commitments undertaken, daily repression and increase in crisis situations — in short, the most damaging policy possible pursued by Israel — have ended up by overtaking the peace process, which had already broken down, and the Middle East now finds itself closer than ever to a general confrontation.

Given this situation, it is urgent that every step be taken to avoid further aggravation, which would be fatal to the peace process. In this respect, the United Nations should bring all its moral and political weight to bear to compel Israel to scrupulously comply with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relating to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and abide by the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council. In this connection, the meeting of the Conference of High Contracting Parties, to be held on 5 December next year, is particularly important.

The Assembly, which has always consistently reaffirmed in the past its support for the just cause of the Palestinian people and its inalienable rights to self-determination and independence, must assume its responsibilities and redress the historical injustice committed against the Palestinian people, so that international law and justice finally prevail in this region of the world.

For this to happen, the United Nations should act as a catalyst and facilitator for the initiatives under way so that the efforts of the various partners in the peace process can coalesce and lead to a return to calm and

create conditions favourable for resuming negotiations. In this respect, Algeria welcomes the statement made on 10 November in this Hall before this Assembly by Mr. George Bush, President of the United States of America, in favour of the creation of a Palestinian State, with internationally recognized borders. This position expressed by the highest authority among the main sponsors of the peace process is, in our view, both a positive development and a significant breakthrough capable of relaunching the peace process and bringing about the early settlement of the Israel-Arab conflict that we have awaited for so long.

Any just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine should be based on international law, as embodied in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the respect by Israel of the commitments undertaken in the framework of the peace process, in particular the principle of "land for peace" agreed to in Madrid. Such a settlement must make it possible to achieve the national rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to the establishment of an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

To this end, and in order to relaunch the dialogue, we consider it necessary to start from a common basis, accepted by and acceptable to all. We already have such a basis, in the form of the recommendations contained in the Mitchell Report, whose pertinence and validity the international community, on the whole, has commended. Based on a balanced approach, this report provides for a series of measures aimed at ensuring the relaunching of the peace process, which has long been at a standstill. These measures relate to putting an end to acts of violence, freezing settlements, restoring trust and resuming negotiations. The Assembly should now call for the full and urgent implementation of its recommendations.

It is essential, in this respect, for an impartial monitoring mechanism to be quickly established on the ground, which would be in keeping with a follow-up to the Mitchell Report. It is also urgent and indispensable for the Security Council to deploy international observers as soon as possible in the occupied territories so as to ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population.

Algeria, which is now more than ever convinced that peace is a strategic option, and therefore remains firmly committed to a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the conflict in the Middle East, of which the question of Palestine is the key element, would like to reiterate here its full support and its active solidarity with the fraternal Palestinian people in its fight to recover its freedom and to establish an independent and sovereign State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): The situation in the Middle East continues to be a matter of grave concern to the international community. Acts of violence flare up, inflict destruction, damage property, cause great loss of life and generate deep sorrow and desire for revenge among both the Palestinian and Israeli people. The Lao People's Democratic Republic expresses its concern over the current situation in the region and strongly condemns these acts of violence and the excessive use of force against the Palestinians. We also repeat our call for the complete and unconditional implementation of the ceasefire agreement of 17 October 2000, the Mitchell recommendations and relevant United Nations resolutions, so that the peace process could be brought back on track and an eventual solution to the Palestinian problem secured once and for all.

It is gratifying for my delegation to note that, during the past year, the international community has witnessed some welcome developments in the Middle East towards the resumption of the peace process, in particular the Mitchell committee's recommendations, the September meeting at Gaza International Airport between the heads of the two sides and the October statement by the United States President concerning the creation of a Palestinian State. Regrettably, the earnest hope of the world community has been ruined recently by bloody clashes and incidents. The situation on the ground is still fragile, and the existing peace and security remain in jeopardy.

The best way, in our opinion, to end violence before it spreads even further is to help the interested parties move as fast as possible towards a final agreement. In this regard, the international community must redouble its efforts to do everything possible to assist the two parties to bring a rapid end to the current violence so that hope can be restored to both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

We renew our call to the world community to continue exerting political and diplomatic efforts that would support and promote negotiations between

Palestine and Israel with the aim of finding a just and comprehensive settlement to the ongoing conflict. As known to all, the Palestinian people have suffered far too long, and as the question of Palestine is at the heart of the Middle East problem, no solution in the Middle East can be envisaged that does not fully take into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. Only when the Palestinian issues are resolved in a just and reasonable manner and all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are restored will Palestine and Israel enjoy real and lasting peace.

In this context, my delegation wishes to reaffirm the Lao People's Democratic Republic's unwavering support for the Palestinian people under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in their struggle to exercise their inalienable rights, in particular, the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian state in their homeland, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, while, of course, respecting Israel's right to exist.

It is true that the road to peace is not an easy one, as numerous obstacles do remain. However, this cause of peace is just and represents the ardent hope of the peoples in the region to live together, to cooperate and to co-exist peacefully. It is therefore, incumbent upon us all to do whatever we possibly can to stop the ongoing conflict and ensure that the peace process in the Middle East can be put back on track. We firmly believe that dialogue, rather than confrontation, will always remain the surest path to peace and security, and the question of Palestine can be resolved only by peaceful means in accordance with the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter.

Let us wish all the best to the two parties directly concerned, Israel and the PLO, in their efforts to resolve the current crisis and open up ways towards the establishment of a just and durable peace in this volatile region.

Mr. Koonjul (Mauritius): My delegation is pleased to participate in the debate on agenda item 41, entitled "Question of Palestine", in the General Assembly today, coinciding with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On this very important day, I wish to reiterate the continued support of the Government and people of Mauritius for the people of Palestine in their quest for achieving their inalienable rights to self-determination and statehood.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Ambassador Papa Louis Fall, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to the members of the Committee for the report contained in document A/56/35. Since its establishment in 1975, the Committee has spared no efforts in working relentlessly towards the implementation of the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

Today, at this very critical stage in Israeli-Palestinian relations, the Committee's role takes an added dimension in advancing the Palestinian cause. At this juncture, the Palestinian people need, more than ever before, the continued engagement of the international community in the search for peace in the Middle East.

As pointed out this morning by Ambassador Patricia Durrant, President of the Security Council, at the solemn meeting held to commemorate today's event, the question of Palestine first came on the agenda of the General Assembly over half a century ago. In 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which provided for the partition of Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish. More than 50 years later we are still struggling to see the full implementation of that resolution.

Today's commemoration is yet another grim reminder that the second State, the Arab State provided for by the partition resolution, is yet to be established. The fact that the Palestinian people have still not been provided with a homeland constitutes a gross injustice, not only to them but also to humankind in general. It is morally unacceptable that what has been given to one people is still being denied another. Such a situation has stifled the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for too long, and we understand their feelings and sympathize fully with them.

To add insult to injury, the Middle East peace process has been subjected both intentionally and unintentionally to several blows. During the past year the situation on the ground has deteriorated beyond anyone's imagination. Hundreds of civilians, mostly Palestinians, have been killed; tens of thousands, including hundreds of children, have been wounded and permanently disabled. The economic blockade imposed by Israel has further exacerbated the suffering

of the Palestinian people. Israel's policy of the targeted extrajudicial killing of Palestinian activists and political leaders, the indiscriminate and excessive use of force, the occupation of Orient House and other Palestinian offices by Israel and the frequent Israeli incursions into areas under full Palestinian control have all seriously undermined decades of hard-won gains.

Mauritius has on several occasions unequivocally condemned those acts both in the Assembly and in the Security Council, and today we once again call upon Israel to exercise utmost restraint in all its actions and to stop all acts of provocation, including the expansion of settlement activities.

We equally condemn all acts of terrorism, which have deepened the sense of anger, bitterness and suspicion between the two parties and at the same time have contributed to derailing the peace process. We appeal to both sides to stop the cycle of violence and to give a chance to peaceful negotiations, because Mauritius believes that, despite all the tragic events, peace in the Middle East is not as elusive as we might think. In fact, these events, as well as those of 11 September, should strengthen the resolve of the international community to pursue its efforts to take forward the peace process and to build upon the various milestones reached in the protracted Middle East peace process beginning with the Camp David Accords in 1978, through the Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo Accords, to the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings of last year.

Time has been lost. But how much more time and how many more lives must be lost before the two sides decide to end the current stalemate? The physics of politics has always proved that the middle position always prevails over the extremes. It is therefore imperative that the political leaders return without further delay and without preconditions to the negotiating table and devise means for the unconditional implementation of the recommendations contained in the Mitchell report. That report, which has been accepted by both parties, remains the only viable option available today and contains all the ingredients for reviving the peace process. The report offers a balanced, sensible and coherent foundation for overcoming the current stalemate. We call upon the two sides immediately to seize the valuable opportunities provided by the Mitchell report and the ceasefire agreement brokered by the United States — the Tenet plan — to move out of the impasse.

At this critical juncture in the Middle East crisis, it is imperative that all parties concerned, the co-sponsors of the peace process, the European Union and the international community at large exert all necessary efforts to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the Mitchell report. We are thankful to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan for his sustained efforts and determination to put an end to the violence and to work towards the resumption of the peace process.

We are reassured by the recent statement by President Bush pledging to work towards the day when both Israel and Palestine will live peacefully together within secure and recognized borders, as called for by various Security Council resolutions. We also welcome the statement made some 10 days ago by the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, outlining the United States vision for the Middle East and a United States pledge of greater involvement in the search for peace in the region. The new dynamics in world politics and the renewed efforts of the United States Government in favour of a sovereign Palestinian State will, in our view, give new impetus to the peace process. It is our strong hope that the Palestinian people will soon achieve their cherished goal of statehood while Israel enjoys all the security it so deserves.

Ms. Iyer (India): Today we solemnly commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Government and the people of India once again reaffirm their solidarity with the people of Palestine, who have struggled bravely for the past five decades to attain their inalienable rights.

India's bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people have been strengthened and reinvigorated with the passage of time. Since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. Starting with our vote against the partition of Palestine, through India's 1974 recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and our recognition of the State of Palestine in 1988, to the opening of our representative office to the Palestinian National Authority in 1996, India has consistently stood by the Palestinian people. India has actively supported peace initiatives in the Middle East. India is committed to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the

principle of land for peace. We support the inalienable and legitimate right of the Palestinian people to a homeland as well as the right of all States of the region, including Israel and Palestine, to exist peacefully within secure and internationally recognized boundaries.

We remain convinced that, under President Arafat's leadership, the Palestinian people stand on the threshold of a new era wherein their national aspirations, for which they have struggled for so long, can be realized. We remain vitally interested in peace, development and stability in the region and are ready to assist in whatever way we can.

When the Madrid Conference was convened and the Oslo process initiated, India shared the optimism of the international community that the time frame, the road maps and the mutual obligations of the Israelis and the Palestinians would be respected and that there would be moves towards final status talks to settle complicated issues such as Jerusalem, refugees and borders. However, the Camp David and Taba talks did not lead to the culmination of the Oslo Accords, and indeed many of the interim obligations remain unfulfilled. The resulting frustration of the Palestinian people has found expression in the intifada.

The tragic cycle of violence that has engulfed the Middle East region since September last year has been damaging to peace and stability. It is a source of deep concern to all of us. That violence has led to the most regrettable loss of hundreds of lives and has injured thousands. It has derailed the Middle East peace process and has severely dented the trust and confidence between the parties without which there cannot be forward movement on negotiated agreements about interim and final status issues. The longer the violence continues, the greater the danger that extremist and radical tendencies will be strengthened. In turn, such a development would be detrimental to a peaceful resolution. That is why it is essential to exercise utmost restraint, to eschew violence and counter-violence and to shun all acts that could destabilize the peace process.

An important issue that has vitiated the atmosphere has been the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. The rapid growth and expansion of settlements and the establishment of new ones since the signing of the Oslo accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority undermines mutual confidence as well as the credibility of the peace process. We trust that Israel will respect the overwhelming sentiment of the international community in favour of a freeze on all settlement activity.

We believe that the Mitchell report and the Tenet plan are means to enable the transition from the current situation of intifada-related strife to the negotiating table, where the modalities of ending the Israeli occupation and final-status issues must be resolved. Moreover, the implementation of the Mitchell report should not be impeded by unrealistic conditions. India supports the G-8 statement on international monitoring.

India has engaged itself continuously with the leaders of the region in a bid to encourage moves towards peace. We were honoured to host a visit this year by President Arafat.

The plight of Palestinian refugees living in the camps scattered in the West Asian region is distressing, and both sides need to address this issue as part of the final- status negotiations, with the active engagement and support of the international community. India stands ready to assist the Palestinian people in their hour of need.

There is a general recognition that, together with political support for the peace process, there is a need to focus on the multifaceted tasks of nation-building. The fledgling Palestinian National Authority requires generous assistance, particularly in the fields of health, education and the creation of employment. Infrastructure development is an area of critical importance. The challenges confronting the people of Palestine are also challenges for the international community and merit its urgent attention and support.

An unfortunate accompaniment of this current phase of violence is the severe impoverishment of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Such human impoverishment, in such a short span of time, negates years of sustained assistance by the international community to help build the human-resource potential of the Palestinian people and the economic infrastructure in Palestinian Authority areas. This aspect needs to be addressed on an urgent basis. India joins the international community's call for an immediate easing of restrictions on the Palestinians. Funds that are due to the Palestinian Authority should be made available.

India remains ready to engage with the Palestinian National Authority and the Palestinian people in their reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Two Indian-aided projects in the Gaza Strip — the Jawaharlal Nehru Library at Al-Azhar University and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College in Deir Al-Balah — have been completed. India has sent medical supplies for use by hospitals in West Bank and Gaza. Very soon a consignment of hospital equipment will be shipped to Gaza. The Indian Government has a substantial ongoing programme for human- resources development for the Palestinian National Authority. We are ready to do more.

While it is incumbent on all of us to work together to advance the peace process in West Asia, ultimately it is the parties themselves that have to shoulder the major responsibility for achieving a permanent and lasting solution. A spirit of accommodation and political will must imbue the negotiation process. The parties must harness all their energies to achieve a just and comprehensive peace.

Mr. De Ruyt (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area — Iceland — align themselves with this statement.

Since our debate last year the situation in the Middle East has worsened considerably. The bloodshed and the provocations have increased, both in Israel and in the occupied territories. They have aggravated an already alarming situation and have rendered ineffective the international community's efforts to secure the relaunch of a political process.

On the ground, there seems to be no end to the cycle of violent acts and reprisals. Since September last year, the conflict has taken the lives of nearly 1,000 people and left thousands injured. Innocent civilians on both sides have been affected by the confrontations, the terror, the provocations and the violence. People are suffering; they cannot remain hostage to the conflict indefinitely. The lack of any political perspective encourages further confrontation and plays into the hands of the extremists. But there are no winners in this chain of confrontation and violence. The parties must get back to the path of dialogue and negotiation without delay.

Six months ago, a diagnosis was made, and a remedy was suggested. On 22 May the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee submitted its report. That report and its realistic and balanced recommendations enjoy wide international support. The European Union supports them unreservedly, and both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority have accepted them. These recommendations form the most suitable basis for finding a way out of the crisis.

The broad lines of a way out do exist, therefore, but the decisions to be taken require political will and courage. We call upon the Israelis and the Palestinians to ensure the full and unconditional implementation of the Mitchell report and of the Tenet plan, especially as regards the cessation of violence and an immediate freeze on settlement activity. Only in this way will it be possible to build peace between the parties. Moreover, a political perspective must accompany conciliation and be the driving force behind it.

The European Union calls on the Palestinian Authority to do all it can to halt the violence against Israel, and more particularly to arrest and bring before the courts the perpetrators, instigators and sponsors of terrorist acts. It also calls on upon it to combat incitement to violence in all its forms.

The Union condemns the Israeli army's reoccupation of areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority and takes note of the withdrawal of its forces from Area A. It recalls the need for an immediate lifting of the closures in the Palestinian territories. It also recalls that extra-judicial executions are illegal under international law and unacceptable, and it calls on Israel to exercise the greatest restraint in the use of military force. Finally, we call on the Israeli Government to facilitate the access of humanitarian staff and assistance to the Palestinian population.

One of the measures identified by the Mitchell report to restore trust between the parties is a recommendation calling for a total freeze on settlement activity, including the natural growth of existing settlements. In the Union's view, these activities are prejudicial to the outcome of the negotiations and are contrary to international law. Moreover, this policy will

not assist the search for a just and lasting peace. It is imperative that it be ended immediately.

The European Union continues to be in favour of the setting up of a third-party monitoring mechanism, in agreement with the parties, so as to help them overcome their differences and the obstacles they encounter in their efforts at reconciliation. It remains willing to contribute to such a mechanism.

The parties must seize the opportunity offered by the Mitchell recommendations to resume negotiations. In this connection, the Union shares the vision and welcomes the commitment of the President of the United States, George W. Bush, in his search for peace in the Middle East, based on the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and on the peaceful coexistence of the two States, Israel and Palestine, as he himself outlined to the Assembly on 10 November and as Secretary of State Colin Powell reiterated in Kentucky. This should allow us to work even more closely together. That commitment opens the way to a ceasefire and the resumption of political negotiations so as to achieve a comprehensive agreement putting an end to this historic conflict. After more than a year of violence, it is clear that only negotiation, taking into consideration the expectations of both parties, is capable of bringing about a definitive resolution of the question of Palestine.

The European Union is convinced that the framework of the peace process offers the only reasonable hope for putting an end to this conflict. Indeed, there is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians and Israelis want to live in peace.

Many stages of the peace process have been completed, despite the various difficulties and obstacles. The gains must be preserved and, more importantly, brought to fruition. A just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine must be based on the principles of the Madrid Conference, in particular the principle of land for peace, and on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Agreements have also been signed by the parties, leading to real results on the ground, and progress has been made in earlier discussions and negotiations.

In the current circumstances, the European Union calls on both parties to do their utmost at the political, security, economic and social levels to return to the path of negotiation, without prior conditions and with the aim of satisfying the legitimate expectations of the peoples in the region, as expressed at the Madrid Conference in 1991.

For the Palestinians, this means the establishment of a viable and democratic State and an end to the occupation of their territories. On the basis of the declarations it adopted at Berlin and New York, the Union reaffirms that the Palestinians have an unqualified right to self-determination, including the right to create an independent State. For the Israelis, it means the right to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. The European Union has always recognized Israel's legitimate concerns in this area, and wishes to stress its commitment with regard to Israel's security.

Above all, it is up to the parties themselves to seek peace, through a process of negotiating all elements that have to be settled in the framework of permanent status discussions. This involves, in particular, finding a just and viable solution to the issues of Jerusalem and refugees, and the provision of economic support for the Palestinian population.

The European Union — reaffirms its readiness to assist — in close cooperation with all parties concerned, in particular the United States of America, the Russian Federation and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as well as the regional partners, including Jordan and Egypt in finding a definitive solution to the conflict.

Mr. Lancry (Israel): For the first time in years, we are debating the question of Palestine amid a seemingly hopeless cycle of violence that has turned back the clock to a more desperate period. The story of Israel is told through the histories of its many diverse people, their many countries of origin and their many languages, religions and cultures. But it is also told through the history of our wars, of our many sons and daughters who have fallen in defence of the right of the Jewish people to self-determination and our right to live in peace and security.

In the past decade, we — both the Israelis and the Palestinians — have taken bold steps to write a new chapter in our history. The hopes of Israelis soared when the Israeli Government, under the leadership of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, pioneered the Oslo peace process, and Chairman Arafat recognized Israel's right to exist, renounced the use of violence

and terrorism and entered into negotiations aimed at bringing about a final settlement to our conflict.

Over the past year, those hopes have been damaged; but they have not been destroyed. Even as we live with the looming threat of terrorism, and even as Israel is forced to take extraordinary measures to protect its civilians from deadly violence, the Israeli people have not lost hope that we may yet achieve a genuine and lasting peace with our Palestinian partners.

In this connection, we welcome the renewed American efforts to assist us in the most urgent task at hand: bringing about a complete and unconditional cessation of violence. We are hopeful that this new initiative will be a successful one. Israel is committed to doing all that it can to work with our Palestinian partners to restore calm and quiet to the region. We are confident that if this can be achieved, it will create the conditions necessary for a resumption of negotiations.

We are long past the time for accusations and recriminations. Our efforts to usher in a new era of peace and coexistence in the Middle East will be forever hindered if we focus exclusively on the pain and misery of the past. We must set our sights on a future of peace, prosperity, coexistence, security and opportunity for all.

As for the Palestinians, they must come to terms with the reality of Israel as a sovereign Jewish State. As American Secretary of State Powell said recently,

> "Palestinians must eliminate any doubt, once and for all, that they accept the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish State".

The violence of the past year has exacted a heavy price, but it has provided nothing in return. The fact that hundreds of Palestinians and Israelis have been killed and thousands more maimed and wounded has caused us unspeakable pain and heartbreak, but has not brought the Palestinians any closer to their goals. We must recognize that nothing positive can emerge if we continue down this road.

Just last week we were again reminded of the tragedy of conflict, of the indiscriminate and cruel ways in which it attacks those who are most vulnerable. Israel deeply regrets the tragic death of five Palestinian children from the Al-Astal family, and we express our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. This is a poignant example of how pain has no frontiers and of how the sorrow and grief of the Palestinian people permeates us, as Israelis, as well.

These senseless deaths must not be taken as inspiration for revenge, however, but must serve to reaffirm our belief that only by silencing our weapons can we create a better future for our people.

In the last few days Israelis have been given yet more reasons to grieve. It is with a heavy heart that I inform the Assembly that just a few hours ago — four hours ago, to be precise — Palestinian terrorists detonated an explosive charge on a public bus near the town of Pardes Hannah. This abhorrent terrorist bombing resulted in the deaths of three Israelis and seriously wounded several others, some of them listed in critical condition.

Today's bus bombing is the fourth lethal Palestinian terrorist attack in two days. Just this morning, Palestinian terrorists killed another Israeli commuter in a drive-by shooting. On Tuesday, Palestinian terrorists unleashed a deadly fusillade in the Israeli city of Afula and another later in the day in Gush Katif. These attacks claimed the lives of two women and one young man, and wounded several others, including a two-year-old girl.

These indiscriminate acts of terrorism on innocent, unassuming civilians are indefensible both morally and legally. The Palestinian speaker in today's debate, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, called for an end to the international terrorism. Mr. Kaddoumi should begin by bringing an end to the Palestinian terrorism that has taken root in Palestinian territory, corrupted the peace process and caused the death of scores of innocents on both sides.

The Palestinians often speak of their strategic choice for peace, but their tactical choice is one of terrorism. Peace and terrorism cannot coexist. The Palestinians cannot call for a ceasefire and the implementation of the Mitchell report and the Tenet agreement while continuing to permit the perpetration of deadly acts of terrorism against Israel.

We expect that this week's attacks will finally move the Palestinian leadership to do more than merely issue the occasional condemnation when it is politically convenient to do so. We expect that action will finally be undertaken, in accordance with signed commitments, to bring Palestinian terrorists to justice

and that the Palestinian leadership will stop supporting, encouraging, inciting and harbouring terrorists.

Both the shooting spree in Afula and today's bus bombing occurred in northern Israel, just a few kilometres from the City of Jenin, from which Israeli forces withdrew just days ago. Israel's presence in Jenin was not something that we had sought, but was rather a direct result of the Palestinian failure to fulfil its commitments. The unrelenting violence and terrorism of the past year have imposed upon Israel a weighty responsibility that requires us to undertake preventive measures in defence of our citizens.

On his journey to sow death and devastation, a suicide bomber, or the mastermind behind him, has already implacably sentenced scores of innocent civilians — children and adults — to death and misery without any judicial procedure. No effort is made to determine guilt or innocence; there is no consideration of due process and principles of justice. Their murderous ways are indiscriminate and merciless.

The only way to prevent such an unbearable outcome is to bring justice to the suicide bombers and those who send them. These are not actions that we enjoy, but they are nonetheless indispensable if we are to carry out our basic duty to ensure the safety and security of our citizens. Moreover, such actions would be entirely unnecessary and would cease completely if the violence were brought to an end.

Indeed, ending the violence is the only way we can move forward. Only a recognition of the futility of war can reopen the door to negotiations. That door was first opened by Egypt and later by Jordan, after their courageous leaders decided to pursue the path of peace. The benefits of quiet borders, increases in tourism and trade, and greater prosperity are the results of a peace agreement predicated on a rejection of violence and a commitment to dialogue.

Chairman Arafat, too, recognized the uselessness of violent confrontation in his letter of 9 September 1993, in which he renounced the use of violence and terror, recognized Israel's right to live in peace and security, and committed the Palestinian people to the peace process. This commitment was the fundamental basis for the Oslo process and must be the centrepiece of any final agreement reached between the two sides.

Indeed, the whole notion of a peace process is fundamentally at odds with violence and incitement. True peace cannot be achieved if leaders negotiate a settlement at the same time as they prime their people for war. Peace requires a culture of peace, the end of contempt and defamation, and the end of incitement and confrontation. Peace requires a language of peace, expressed in the way leaders address their nations, teachers teach their students and religious leaders inspire their followers.

It is our belief that such a peace is still attainable. But it can be realized only at the negotiating table, and we can reach the negotiating table only when Chairman Arafat reaffirms his commitment of 9 September 1993, not only in word but also in deed.

We live in a world of extraordinary change and opportunity. Cooperation is replacing conflict as the primary mode of interaction between States in every corner of the world. This trend offers us the means to introduce a new era of cooperation in the Middle East based on mutual recognition, reconciliation and the right of all peoples to live in peace and security.

The Mitchell report, the Tenet ceasefire agreement and the Powell initiative provide us with a road map out of the present quagmire and towards a process that will open the Middle East to the opportunities of our time. Israel is committed to these frameworks, and we will work concertedly with all parties towards their realization.

It is my sincerest hope that our Palestinian partners will join us in seizing the opportunity before us. We must embrace it, for the future of our region and the well-being of our children depend on it. The coming year should be a year free from the heartbreak and tragedy of the past, one that will finally bring that long-sought peace to the peoples of the Middle East.

Mr. Requeijo Gual (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Once again, we have come together in this Assembly to address the question of Palestine. Precisely one year ago, as we celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we expressed our profound concern at the outset of a new and deplorable chapter in the history of assaults against and violations of the most fundamental rights of the Palestinian people. Those were the first two months of the second intifada, in which the casualties mounted precipitously and many were eager to see wisdom prevail over the bloodshed and suffering of an entire people.

Unfortunately, however, a year later we continue with dismay, distress and helplessness to see the deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories. There have been 14 months of tragic acts of violence, confrontation and outright warfare that have caused the deaths of more than 1,000 people and injured tens of thousands, including children, women and the elderly. Although the economic damage has been significant, the sorrow and mourning are truly immeasurable.

Since 28 September 2000, Israel has imposed its law implacably through lethal incursions into Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem, the destruction of property on an increasingly large scale, the creation of new and the expansion of established settlements on Palestinian land, military occupation and the implementation of a pitiless blockade, which paralyses economic activity, imposes severe difficulties on the Palestinian people and is destroying the little that remains of the fragile trust between the two parties.

These actions make the possibility of achieving fair and lasting peace in Palestine, and throughout the Middle East ever more remote. Israel continues to defy and ignore the many resolutions of this Assembly, the Security Council and the Commission on Human Rights concerning the question of Palestine. The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and international humanitarian law are being openly flouted. At a time when the international community has openly and promptly voiced its resolve to combat terrorism, we view those outrages with profound concern. Resolutions that were adopted more than 50 years ago have been and continue to be ignored. We might well ask ourselves why there is so much incompetence and inaction.

Today more than ever, the United Nations has the key responsibility to participate actively in the search for a solution to the question of Palestine. The General Assembly must help to revitalize the peace process in the light of the manifest inability of the Security Council to enforce its own resolutions in any circumstances. We all know when, how and why such double standards are applied. They must be abandoned, along with the anachronistic privilege of the veto exercised by the United States on the many occasions when it must protect its allies and accomplices, regardless of the flagrant violations that they may commit before all mankind, making impunity a fundamental feature of their activities.

My delegation is highly honoured to be a co-sponsor again this year of the four draft resolutions submitted under agenda item 41. As it has traditionally done, Cuba will vote in favour of the draft resolutions and hopes that they will enjoy the majority support of the delegations present here.

We have heard enough speeches full of promises that vanish into thin air. We have heard enough rhetorical insinuations that fail to be translated into deeds. We have seen enough immoral complicity and injustice. We must call forcefully on Israel to comply with all the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. To use a fashionable term, there is no need to draw a new road map to chart the way to peace. It has existed for some time now and we must do our utmost to use it, without dangerous deviations that harm the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Cuba once again condemns the acts of aggression and state terrorism directed by Israel against the Palestinian people and reaffirms its resolute solidarity with that people in its struggle to establish an independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to secure the return of all occupied Arab territories. We must act with resolve and fortitude. Let us strive for justice and peace. Let us spare present and future generations of Palestinian children the horrors of the recent past and of the present.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.